

0149T

REMARKS

By

C. EVERETT KOOP, MD

SURGEON GENERAL

AND

DEPUTY ASSISTANT SECRETARY FOR HEALTH

PRESENTED AT THE PRESS CONFERENCE FOR THE

AMERICAN ACADEMY OF PEDIATRIC'S

INJURY PREVENTION PROGRAM

PHILADELPHIA, PENNSYLVANIA

APRIL 15, 1983

(GREETINGS TO HOSTS, GUESTS)

I AM DELIGHTED TO BE HERE TO HELP LAUNCH THIS IMPORTANT PUBLIC HEALTH PROGRAM. THIS YEAR, MORE THAN 10,000 CHILDREN -- SOME OF THEM JUST BORN AND OTHERS ALREADY 14 YEARS OLD -- MORE THAN 10,000 OF THEM WILL DIE AN ACCIDENTAL DEATH.

BUT WE KNOW THERE ARE VERY FEW REAL "ACCIDENTS" THAT KILL CHILDREN. FOR EXAMPLE, ABOUT HALF OF THOSE 10,000 CHILDREN WILL DIE IN HIGHWAY ACCIDENTS -- OR SO-CALLED "HIGHWAY ACCIDENTS."

BUT THERE IS NOTHING "ACCIDENTAL" ABOUT A PARENT NOT STRAPPING A CHILD INTO AN INFANT CAR SEAT OR BUCKLING UP AN OLDER CHILD'S SEAT-BEAT.

THERE'S NOTHING "ACCIDENTAL" ABOUT A PARENT WHO IGNORES A BALCONY RAILING THAT A SMALL CHILD CAN SLIP THROUGH AND FALL TO ITS DEATH.

AND THERE'S NOTHING ACCIDENTAL ABOUT A PARENT WHO LEAVES A TODDLER PLAYING ALONE NEAR A RIVER BANK OR A GARDEN POND OR AN ANKLE-DEEP MUD-PUDDLE.

TO MY WAY OF THINKING, THOSE KINDS OF INCIDENTS ARE NOT ACCIDENTS. THEY ARE FAILURES ON THE PART OF PARENTS TO DO THE RIGHT THING, THE LIFE-SAVING THING FOR THEIR CHILDREN.

WHY DO PARENTS? WHY DO THEY CONTRIBUTE TO THE INJURY OR DEATH OF THEIR CHILD? VERY FEW PARENTS ARE TRULY HOMICIDAL TOWARD THEIR KIDS. THE ONES THAT ARE, ARE HOMICIDAL TOWARD OTHER PEOPLE, TOO. THEY ARE NOT A PROBLEM SO MUCH FOR PEDIATRICIANS AS THEY ARE FOR THE POLICE.

NO, PARENTS DO THESE THINGS BECAUSE -- SOMEHOW -- SOMEWHERE ALONG THE LINE -- THEY SIMPLY DIDN'T GET THE MESSAGE THAT THEY HAVE A DEEP AND ROUND-THE-CLOCK RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE PHYSICAL SAFETY OF THEIR CHILDREN.

AND THAT'S WHAT THIS PROGRAM IS ALL ABOUT.

THE AMERICAN ACADEMY OF PEDIATRICS RECOGNIZES THAT ITS MEMBERS CAN DO MORE THAN CURE CHILDREN OF CERTAIN DISEASE CONDITIONS. THEY CAN ALSO HAVE A POSITIVE INFLUENCE ON THE BEHAVIOR OF PARENTS.

PEDIATRICIANS ARE A REMARKABLE GROUP OF MEN AND WOMEN. THEY ARE TRUE ADVOCATES FOR THE HEALTH AND WELL-BEING OF CHILDREN. AND PARENTS KNOW THAT AND RESPECT THEIR PEDIATRICIANS FOR TAKING ON THAT VERY ROLE OF CHILD ADVOCATE.

AND THAT'S WHY THE ACADEMY FEELS THAT PARENTS WILL LISTEN TO THE ADVICE OF PEDIATRICIANS WHO SAY, "DON'T LET YOUR CHILD BE HURT OR DIE BECAUSE YOU DID NOT KEEP YOUR WITS ABOUT YOU."

I THINK THE ACADEMY IS RIGHT AND I AM HERE TODAY TO GIVE THEM THE FULL SUPPORT OF THE OFFICE OF SURGEON GENERAL OF THE UNITED STATES IN THIS ACCIDENT PREVENTION PROGRAM.

I MIGHT ADD THAT SUCH AN INITIATIVE BY A NON-GOVERNMENT, PROFESSIONAL ORGANIZATION IS THE KIND OF THING WE SUPPORT WHOLE-HEARTEDLY. FRANKLY, IT RENEWS MY OWN FAITH IN THE ABILITY OF THE AMERICAN PEOPLE TO IDENTIFY AND SOLVE MANY OF OUR SOCIETY'S MOST DIFFICULT PROBLEMS WITH THEIR OWN ENERGIES AND HUMAN RESOURCES.

GOVERNMENT HAS A ROLE AND WE DO NOT INTEND TO SHIRK IT. BUT THE PUBLIC HAS A ROLE TO PLAY, ALSO. WHETHER AS PRIVATE LAYPERSONS OR AS PROFESSIONALS OR AS COMMUNITY LEADERS, THERE ARE MANY JOBS THAT CAN BE DONE ON PRIVATE INITIATIVE.

AND THIS IS ONE...THE ACADEMY'S INJURY PREVENTION PROGRAM.

JUST SUCH A PARTNERSHIP OF GOVERNMENT AND THE PROFESSIONS WAS IDENTIFIED AS ESSENTIAL TO REACHING THE "OBJECTIVES FOR THE NATION," WHICH THE PUBLIC HEALTH SERVICE PUBLISHED IN 1980. THESE OBJECTIVES RANGE OVER A WIDE VARIETY OF MAJOR PUBLIC HEALTH PROBLEMS, SUCH AS ALCOHOLISM, SMOKING, HYPERTENSION, VENEREAL DISEASE, AND POOR NUTRITION. IN 1980 WE SET SOME 10-YEAR OBJECTIVES IN EACH OF THESE PROBLEM AREAS.

AND REGARDING ACCIDENTS AMONG CHILDREN, WE SAID THAT BY 1990 WE HOPE WE WILL HAVE REDUCED BY NEARLY HALF THE MOTOR VEHICLE FATALITY RATE FOR CHILDREN UNDER THEB AGE OF 15.

ONE OF THE WAYS WE SAID THIS MIGHT OCCUR WOULD BE BY HAVING ALL PRIMARY CARE PHYSICIANS KNOW ABOUT THE IMPORTANCE OF SAFETY BELTS AND TALK ABOUT THEM TO PARENTS. ONE SURVEY IN 1979 SHOWED THAT ONLY 20 PERCENT OF PEDIATRICIANS ADVISED PARENTS ABOUT AUTOMOBILE SAFETY.

THE PROGRAM WE ARE ANNOUNCING TODAY IS DIRECTLY IN SUPPORT OF THIS NATIONAL OBJECTIVE TO SENSITIZE ALL PEDIATRICIANS TO THE IMPORTANCE OF TELLING PARENTS ABOUT AUTO SAFETY -- AND HELPING THEM DO JUST THAT.

FURTHER ON IN THIS PRESS CONFERENCE MEMBERS OF THE ACADEMY WILL DESCRIBE THE VARIOUS INJURY PREVENTION MATERIALS THEY HAVE PREPARED FOR THE USE OF PEDIATRICIANS AND THEIR PATIENTS. THEY ARE NOT LIMITED TO AUTO SAFETY BUT DEAL WITH OTHER MAJOR CAUSES OF INJURY AND DEATH AMONG YOUNG CHILDREN: BURNS...DROWNING...FALLS...CHOKING AND SUFFOCATION... AND POISONING.

THESE MATERIALS WERE THEY WERE TESTED OUT BY PROJECT STAFF IN CALIFORNIA, MASSACHUSETTS, AND VIRGINIA, WORKING WITH STATE HEALTH DEPARTMENT PERSONNEL, THE STAFF OF OUR OWN DIVISION OF MATERNAL AND CHILD HEALTH, AND MEMBERS OF THE ACADEMY'S COMMITTEE ON ACCIDENT AND POISON PREVENTION.

I THINK THIS IS A VERY WORTHWHILE PROGRAM AND I URGE EVERY PEDIATRICIAN AND EVERY FAMILY PHYSICIAN TO GET HOLD OF THESE MATERIALS AND SHARE THEM WITH THEIR PATIENTS. YOUNG LIVES ARE AT STAKE.

LET ME CLOSE MY REMARKS WITH A LITTLE FACT AND A PLEDGE. FIRST, THE FACT. IT SEEMS THAT, AFTER ABOUT 75,000 YEARS OF WALKING UPRIGHT ON THIS EARTH, THE SPECIES HOMO SAPIENS IS STILL NOT VERY SURE-FOOTED. ACCORDING TO THE CONSUMER PRODUCT SAFETY COMMISSION, MORE THAN 750,000 AMERICANS WILL TRIP AND FALL ON STAIRS OR RAMPS THIS YEAR AND HAVE TO BE TREATED AT HOSPITAL EMERGENCY ROOMS.

THAT'S THE LARGEST CATEGORY OF INJURIES BY A HUGE MARGIN. NOT AUTOMOBILES...NOT CHAIN SAWS...NOT BICYCLES...NOT HOUSEHOLD POISONS... BUT STAIRS. OBVIOUSLY THERE'S A LOT WE DON'T KNOW ABOUT HOW THE HUMAN BEING NEGOTIATES HIS OR HER ENVIRONMENT. SO HERE IS MY PLEDGE:

AS SURGEON GENERAL, I PLEDGE TO SUPPORT INCREASED RESEARCH ON THE CAUSES OF HUMAN INJURY. WE'VE GOT TO KNOW A GREAT DEAL MORE THAN WE DO, IF WE ARE TO STOP BEING THE VICTIMS OF EVEN THE SIMPLEST ENVIRONMENTAL STRUCTURES.

BUT MEANWHILE, I SALUTE THE AMERICAN ACADEMY OF PEDIATRICS, THEIR RESPONSIVE AND RESPONSIBLE MEMBERSHIP, MY COLLEAGUES FOR OVER 35 YEARS, AND I WANT TO RECOGNIZE THEIR PATIENTS, ALSO -- PARENTS AND CHILDREN -- TO WHOSE HEALTH AND WELL-BEING THIS PROGRAM IS DEVOTED.

THANK YOU.

#